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CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW DIRECTIONS STRATEGY FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

SUMMARY

The present report is submitted in compliance with paragraph 9 of decision 9/2 adopted by the High-level Committee at its ninth session.

The report provides a brief description of the new directions strategy and outlines progress made in implementing the strategy in the context of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) programmes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The fundamental changes that have occurred in the structure of international economic relations since the late 1980s, under the influence of the phenomena of globalization and economic liberalization, have had a profound impact on the economic prospects of the developing countries and have served to underline the continued relevance of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) as a strategic dimension of international development cooperation. It was felt, nevertheless, that the concept should be revisited in the light of the changes that had occurred, in order to ensure that TCDC, and indeed South-South cooperation in general, continue to serve as a viable strategy in support of the development efforts of the developing countries and as a means of ensuring their effective participation in the newly emerging global economic order.

2. It was in recognition of this need that the General Assembly in its resolution 49/96 of 19 December 1994 requested the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries at its ninth session to include in its agenda an item entitled "New directions for technical cooperation among developing countries". A comprehensive report on the subject (TCDC/9/3) was prepared by the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. The High-level Committee adopted the main recommendations contained in the report, which was endorsed by the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), by the Economic and Social Council and by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/119 of 20 December 1995.

II. THE NEW DIRECTIONS STRATEGY FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

3. The report called, inter alia, for the adoption of a more strategic orientation for TCDC, focusing on a number of high-priority issues, such as debt, trade and investment, production and employment, poverty eradication, the environment and macroeconomic policy coordination and management, which are likely to have a major development impact on a large number of developing countries. It also called for closer operational integration between TCDC and economic cooperation among developing countries (ECDC) in order to ensure that TCDC serves as a strategic instrument in the service of wider cooperation schemes among developing countries. Special emphasis was also placed on the identification of "pivotal countries" to serve as catalysts in the promotion of TCDC, both within particular regions as well as interregionally. Finally, the report recommended the expansion of the TCDC Information Referral System (INRES) into a multidimensional information system, containing information not only on institutional capacities in the developing countries but also on individual experts and centres of excellence, as well as data on innovative technical cooperation experiences capable of replication in other developing countries. Altogether, the new directions report contains 20 major recommendations that touch on other issues such as the formulation of national TCDC policies, the strengthening of national TCDC focal points, the reorientation of capacity and needs matching exercises, the promotion of "triangular cooperation", the establishment of improved linkages with the private sector and non-governmental

organizations, and the identification of new funding arrangements for TCDC, including the formulation of subject-specific TCDC "products" that could attract special funding on the basis of their intrinsic importance.

III. THE IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

4. Although by the time the new directions report was formally adopted in June 1995, a significant proportion of the resources allocated under the 1992-1996 special programme resources for the promotion of TCDC had already been programmed, the Special Unit for TCDC actively sought to allocate the remaining special programme resources in support of initiatives consistent with the policy thrust outlined in the report and also sought, where possible, to reorient ongoing activities in order to ensure a similar policy consistency.

5. In terms of overall strategic thrust, special emphasis was placed during the period 1995-1996 on TCDC activities related to the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted by the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held at Bridgetown, Barbados, from 25 April to 6 May 1994.[1] In this context, the Special Unit prepared, in accordance with paragraph 106 of the Barbados Programme of Action, a comprehensive directory of experts and institutions relating to small island developing States and also identified critical technical cooperation activities within the 14 areas of the Programme of Action to be implemented on the basis of the application of the TCDC modality and within the framework of the Small Island Developing States Technical Assistance Programme that had been previously formulated by the Unit. Similarly, the Special Unit in collaboration with the Sustainable Development Network Programme within UNDP, has initiated a project designed to implement the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET) with a view to providing improved telecommunication facilities, including Internet access, to a number of small island developing States.

6. With respect to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which was held at Istanbul from 3 to 14 June 1996, the Special Unit played a very active role in supporting the preparatory process for the Conference and also the activities of the Conference itself. The Special Unit funded the preparation of a monograph on best practices in urban management and sponsored a number of regional meetings of mayors and other municipal officials in Accra, Amman, Quito and Kathmandu which formulated regional plans on urban management issues as an input to the Conference. As a follow-up to the Quito regional meeting, a number of TCDC exchanges have taken place between various municipalities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

7. Other strategic initiatives of a regional and interregional nature relate to Africa/Asia cooperation and Latin America/Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) cooperation. In respect of the former, the Special Unit sponsored, within the arrangements of the Bandung Framework for Asia-Africa cooperation, a comprehensive assessment by Indonesian experts of the critical technical cooperation needs of a number of African countries (Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mozambique, Seychelles, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) in such areas as debt management, fiscal policy and industrial sector development that could be met on

a TCDC basis. Priority emphasis is being given to the early implementation of this programme and to its expansion to include other Asian and African countries.

8. Another activity being supported within the framework of the Africa/Asia programme relates to the research programme being carried out by the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA) which is geared to the development of new genetic strains of disaster resistant rice suitable for expanding yields in Africa and also capable of adaptation in some Asian countries. The effort is noteworthy in that it illustrates the potential for African institutions to serve as providers of technical assistance in some areas.

9. In terms of Latin America/Europe/CIS collaboration, efforts are being made to build upon the initial exchanges between the two regions with a view to strengthening the capacity of CIS countries to manage structural adjustment processes, privatization and overall aid coordination efforts.

10. In respect of specific sectoral priorities identified within the framework of the new directions proposals, special emphasis has been placed on the implementation of TCDC initiatives in support of poverty eradication. In this regard, the Special Unit for TCDC, in collaboration with the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Foundation and the World Bank, has supported the implementation of a comprehensive poverty eradication programme based on the documentation of effective poverty eradication strategies in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica and Venezuela and the replication of such experiences through TCDC exchanges within the region. Similar initiatives are planned in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Arab region, in collaboration with the respective regional bureaux within UNDP.

11. During 1996, special emphasis was also placed on providing assistance to promote the full implementation of the agreements concluded among the countries that participated in the capacity and needs matching exercise held in Bangladesh in December 1994 on rural poverty and credit. The assistance provided in this connection also represented an effort to implement an important new directions recommendation which called upon the Special Unit to engage in the longer-term follow-up of agreements reached in capacity and needs matching exercises, instead of confining its assistance to the preparation and organization of such exercises.

12. As part of the effort to reorient capacity and needs matching exercises and to adopt, where appropriate, a flexible approach to such arrangements, the Special Unit supported the convening, within the framework of the Latin American Economic System, of a modified capacity and needs matching exercise in Haiti in November 1995, which brought together 16 Latin American countries in an attempt to identify the development needs in Haiti that could be met on a TCDC basis. Of the total of 144 projects that were identified and formally agreed upon between Haiti and the participating Latin American countries, 22 were independently funded by the Latin American participants, 73 were funded jointly with the Government of Haiti and the remaining 49 projects secured funding from other donor sources. A follow-up mechanism has been established within the Government to ensure the expeditious implementation of the various agreements.

13. In the area of the environment, assistance was also provided in support of the establishment of technical networks for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, policies and practices on biosystematics, which is the proper identification and classification of micro-organisms, insects and nematodes in the South East Asian (ASEANET), Pacific Island (PACINET) and African (EAFRINET) regions. These regional networks are intended to build capacity in countries in the various regions to undertake biosystematics on their own. The proper identification and classification of micro-organisms, insects and nematodes have important implications for the management of biodiverse resources, agriculture and food production and are in line with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and other relevant international and regional conventions on the subject.

14. Another important initiative which falls within the broad rubric of the environment, is the support provided by the Special Unit in respect of the establishment of the International Network on Small Hydropower. The Network, which is located in Hangzhou, China, is designed to facilitate the exchange of technical information, experiences, policies and practices for the sustainable development of small hydropower. The membership of the network includes national energy institutions, private commercial enterprises providing services and equipment and non-governmental organizations working in the field of energy, at both the regional and interregional levels.

15. In keeping with the emphasis in the new directions report on the need to strengthen relations with the private sector in furtherance of TCDC objectives, the Special Unit has worked closely with the Private Sector Development Division within UNDP in stimulating exchanges between small enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean with a view to enabling them to identify strategies that can capitalize on market opportunities provided within the framework of the integration arrangements in the region.

16. In the case of non-governmental organizations, which were also identified in the new directions report as an important constituency to be cultivated in the promotion of TCDC activities, effective collaboration has been established with the Third World Network, which has been supported in its efforts to identify the implications of the Uruguay Round agreements and the overall impact of globalization on the developing countries and in the implementation of TCDC projects designed to enable the developing countries to cope with these processes.

17. In respect of the major recommendation in the new directions report relating to "pivotal countries", a select number of countries, namely, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Tunisia have been initially identified to serve as catalysts for the promotion of TCDC. Special arrangements will be worked out with these countries to enable them to carry out these responsibilities.

18. A major strategic initiative supported by TCDC which illustrates the attempt to establish an operational linkage between TCDC and ECDC, as called for

in the new directions proposals, relates to the South-South Conference on Trade, Finance and Investment held in Costa Rica from 13 to 15 January 1997. The Special Unit for TCDC supported a number of technical inputs at the Conference, which was designed to fashion a wider strategy of economic cooperation among developing countries.

19. In keeping with the new directions report, a number of activities were supported by the Special Unit during 1995 and 1996 in an effort to optimize the use of information technology in the promotion of TCDC. First, a large-scale update of TCDC-INRES was carried out in 1995 and 1996 through a successful data-collection campaign, which resulted in an increase in the number of institutions registered with TCDC-INRES to over 3,400. These institutions collectively offer more than 18,000 training programmes and 12,500 expert services in areas relevant to the needs of developing countries. Information on the capacities of these institutions has been made available on diskette and, in many cases, on the Internet to all national TCDC focal points, country offices, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, thus providing instant access to training and expert services available in the developing world. Further, the Special Unit has sought the collaboration of all UNDP resident representatives in ensuring the use of TCDC-INRES in UNDP country offices, and in strengthening or building the capacity of the national TCDC focal points to manage, maintain and disseminate information that fosters TCDC, including the training of the focal points in computer hardware and software and in the use of electronic mail and the Internet. Finally, the Special Unit has begun the process of expanding TCDC-INRES into a multidimensional information system that will include data on institutional capacities, individual experts, centres of excellence in the developing countries and innovative technical cooperation experiences that could be replicated in other developing countries. An arrangement has already been finalized with the Third World Network of Scientific Organizations/Third World Academy of Sciences to compile successful experiences in the field of science and technology. Similar arrangements are being finalized with some UNDP country offices, TCDC focal points and non-governmental organizations for the collection of successful experiences in other priority development areas.

20. An important feature of the experience in implementing the new directions proposals has been the increasing collaboration between the Special Unit and the Government of Japan, which agreed to allocate in 1996 the sum of US$ 2 million to fund various TCDC projects.

21. The major instrument for giving effect to the new directions proposals in the future is the new TCDC Cooperation Framework, which has been prepared for submission to the UNDP Executive Board. In view of its importance in promoting new directions, a brief summary of its content is provided in the following paragraphs.

22. The 1997-1999 TCDC Cooperation Framework is designed to operationalize the recommendation contained in the new directions report and provides a guide for the utilization of the resources allocated by the UNDP Executive Board as well as other resources likely to become available in the future, including those contributed to the Trust Fund for the Promotion of South-South Cooperation.

23. The programme encompasses activities in two broad categories, namely, (a) support for sustainable human development through TCDC and (b) the promotion of TCDC, which together will support a number of sub-categories. Support for sustainable human development will encompass activities dealing with poverty eradication, environment, production and employment, and trade, investment and macroeconomic management, while the promotion of TCDC will enhance TCDC policy formulation and coordination and capacity for the management of TCDC and information support activities.

24. In carrying out the programme, a number of principles and criteria will be applied in order to ensure that initiatives supported under the programme achieve an optimal development impact. Firstly, priority emphasis will be placed on initiatives that document effective technical cooperation practices in the selected areas of focus of the programme and that have the potential for replication in other developing countries. Secondly, special emphasis will be placed on the development of national, subregional, regional and interregional capacities in formulating and managing TCDC initiatives of a strategic nature. Thirdly, particular attention will be paid to TCDC initiatives that have the potential to support wider economic cooperation schemes among developing countries. Fourthly, efforts will be made to encourage TCDC initiatives aimed at increasing the capacity of developing countries to adopt a coordinated approach to major global economic issues which impinge on their development prospects. The programme will nevertheless maintain some flexibility to respond, on an ad hoc basis, to initiatives that demonstrate creativity and innovation and have the potential to make a significant contribution to the advancement of the development interests of the developing countries. The new TCDC programme will continue to rely on capacity and needs matching exercises, subject-specific workshops, symposiums, twinning arrangements, networking, the "pivotal country" approach and other similar instrumentalities.

25. The existing close collaborative working relations with national, subregional, regional and interregional institutions, UNDP country offices, the various bureaux and units within UNDP and the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, as well as the private sector and non-governmental organizations will be further strengthened. A special effort will be made to promote a synergistic relationship with the various regional programmes, the global programme and activities carried out by other parts of UNDP.

26. The implementation of the programme will be guided by the principle outlined in various declarations of the developing countries and in several General Assembly resolutions which assert that the developing countries themselves have the primary responsibility for promoting TCDC and that therefore the role of the United Nations system is to provide support to these countries in carrying out their programmes.

IV. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

27. From the foregoing, it will be seen that significant progress has been made in implementing the recommendations contained in the new directions report, even though the proposals were elaborated in the middle of the fifth programming cycle at a time when a significant proportion of resources had already been

committed. It is true, nevertheless, that only limited progress has been made in respect of some areas, such as the development of subject-specific TCDC "products" that could attract special funding. Particular emphasis will therefore be placed on this subject in the coming months. Similarly, while the Trust Fund for the Promotion of South-South Cooperation has been formally established in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/119, a special effort will need to be made to ensure the actual mobilization of resources for the Fund. Finally, building upon the successful national focal points meeting held in Singapore in January 1997 for the Asia and Pacific region, renewed efforts will be made to assist Governments to strengthen national TCDC focal point mechanisms and to articulate comprehensive policies on TCDC that will ensure the full integration of TCDC within national development plans.

28. As mentioned earlier, the new TCDC Cooperation Framework for the period 1997-1999 will serve as the instrument to give full expression to the new directions proposals and to reorient future TCDC activities in accordance with its overall policy thrust. The implementation of activities within this framework, beginning in 1997, should therefore enable the Special Unit for TCDC to report to the eleventh session of the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries on substantial progress towards the realization of the new directions goals.

Notes

[1] Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994 (United Nations publication, Sales No. 94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.